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Della Robbia: Sculpting With Color In Renaissance Florence



Synopsis

The brightly hued and technically sophisticated ceramics of a Renaissance master and his workshop—the glazed terra-cotta technique invented by Luca della Robbia, along with his exceptional skill as a sculptor, placed him firmly in the first rank of Renaissance artists in the fifteenth century. The Della Robbia studio produced dazzling multicolored ornaments for major Florentine buildings, delicately modeled and ingeniously constructed freestanding statues, serene blue-and-white devotional reliefs for domestic use, charming portraits of children and commanding busts of rulers, along with decorative and liturgical objects. Important patrons from the Medici family to the French court enhanced the reputation of the Della Robbia style and technique, which in turn inspired imitation by rival artists. In recent years, renewed attention from art historians, backed by sophisticated technical studies, has reintegrated Della Robbia into the mainstream of Renaissance art history and illuminated the originality and accomplishments of the family's studio, which operated into the 16th century. This beautifully illustrated companion to the first major Della Robbia exhibition in the United States brings readers into the workshops of these ingenious artists to experience one of the great inventions of the Renaissance. Luca della Robbia's (1400–82) invention of an innovative technique for creating glazed terra-cotta sculptures was a major scientific and artistic discovery of the Italian Renaissance. Passed down to family members and developed further by each generation, the closely held technique achieved new heights of refinement and durability in modeling and color, and was praised for combining elements of painting and sculpture into a new and (in Vasari's words) "almost eternal" medium.

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Customer Reviews

I grew up seeing Della Robbia in the context of Italy. The MFA (Boston) show this book is more or less a catalogue for was masterfully curated and wonderfully presented, as is this book. Surely Robbia is the most humane artist the Western world has produced. The marble choir stall in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence: the Cantorie by Luca della Robbia. It illustrates Psalm 150 illustrates this humane view of life. As a father and grandfather it sums up as it were all my feelings for art and childhood. Real children were the models for the youths who dance and sing their way around this exquisite frieze. The commission may have been religious but the art itself became the message. The older children wear contemporary costumes and are playing fifteenth-century citharas and other instruments. Della Robbia made careful note of the Greco-Roman works he was inspired by and then made his own drawings from life. As a result, the choir stall is the ultimate Renaissance expression of lovingly building on the epicurean past while also pushing the boundaries of art into the future. The subject is not religious, it is humanistic, in other words the art celebrates the actual beauty of childhood itself and the actual beauty of the craft that captures the beauty of childhood. The love Della Robbia has for the mystery of childhood, for the tenderness of a child's vulnerability, and for the sheer joy of that stage of life "when all activities are undertaken with earnest sincerity" is stunningly true to life in the frieze. The same spirit is found in so many of his terracotta pieces so beautifully portrayed in Marietta Gambareri's wonderful book.

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